

# The Importance of Accurate and Thorough Notes for the Publishing Scholar

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## The Importance of Accurate and Thorough Notes for the Publishing Scholar

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### **The Importance of Accurate and Thorough Notes for the Publishing Scholar**

As university students, budding scholars are frequently taught the importance of taking accurate and thorough notes. Whether they are reading sources, listening to lectures, participating in classes or conferences, doing field work, recording research procedures and results, brainstorming their own ideas or being critical of the ideas of others, students are encouraged to write things down for future use in order to complete course assignments, produce engaging essays, excel in quizzes and examinations and generally enhance their intellectual growth. Given how useful note taking can be, it is rather remarkable that some scholars abandon the practice once their student days are done, especially since accurate and thorough notes can contribute significantly to achieving successful publications.

Scholarly notes can include several kinds of notes. The simplest notes are iterative and record interesting and useful information from what is read in a source or heard at a conference or in a classroom. It is important to indicate in such notes

exactly where the information originated, whether that means recording the complete bibliographical information for a book or article or providing a heading such as 'Dr Smith's Paper on Early Printed Books in England.' Noting page numbers for the most important information you discover in published sources is an excellent practice, and quoting or copying anything that you plan to use in your own work but may not be able to consult again is vital.

Field notes are especially important because they tend to record words and events as they are spoken or occur, and those words and events usually cannot be heard or seen again if the opportunity to record them is missed. It can be extremely difficult to write quickly enough in such situations, so accuracy can be especially challenging, but it is also absolutely essential given that errors can compromise your research and findings, resulting in inaccurate or inappropriate conclusions. It is also important to keep all the contextual details straight, so indicating exactly when and where something happened, who was involved, who spoke certain words and the like is vital.

The notes you take while reading, listening and watching can and in many cases should be critical as well as iterative. Whatever research you may be conducting, you will no doubt be thinking and assessing as you take notes, and these thoughts and assessments are valuable, not only for determining whether particular sources will be useful for your own work and how they might best be introduced and discussed, but also for clarifying your thoughts and refining your research procedures. Many scholars find themselves brainstorming while observing, reading or listening, and this brainstorming is always worth recording with care so that the most interesting ideas can be developed for future use.

Scholarly notes of the kinds discussed above can contribute to the successful publication of your writing in numerous ways, some of them practical in nature and others more intellectual. You will, for instance, save yourself a great deal of time and effort by having accurate and thorough notes and bibliographical information at hand when you wish to cite or quote a source, and you will also prevent errors from creeping into your work. If your research is based on firsthand observation, your notes will be absolutely essential when you write up your work. Taking the time to include your own ideas and criticisms in your notes means that you will be able to return to those initial thoughts in the context of the source that inspired them, which can be immensely helpful when you are struggling to define, explain and develop complex or subtle ideas. Such notes leave a paper trail of your intellectual endeavours that can ultimately prove beneficial for publications that you never even imagined when you first jotted down your thoughts about some interesting concept.

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